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ORGI Scientists

Church Sues FBI Agents, Attorneys for \$7 Million

Scientologists Claim Raids, Seizure of Documents Were in Retaliation for Suits Against Government

BY ROBERT RAWITCH

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The Church of Scientology Monday filed a \$7.8 million damage suit against two Justice Department attorneys and 134 unnamed FBI agents who the church said seized thousands of documents in raids July 8 on two Los Angeles church locations.

The raids were motivated, the church alleged, by the government's desire to retaliate against Scientologists because of the many lawsuits the church has filed against governmental agencies.

Estimates of how many documents were seized have ranged from 20,000 to 100,000. The church claimed the papers were seized so they be used by the government to defend itself against the Scientologists' lawsuits.

Search warrants authorizing the raids in Los Angeles and a third one at the church's headquarters in Washington, D.C., were based on allegations by a former high church official that the hierarchy of the church was involved in extensive criminal activities.

The former official, Michael Meisner, has admitted taking part in three burglaries in the U.S. Courthouse in Washington and has attempted to implicate other church officials in the break-ins.

The alleged purpose of the illegal entries was to obtain documents

about the church which it had been unable to obtain through Freedom of Information Act lawsuits.

Scientology considers itself an applied religious philosophy which attempts to increase an individual's self-knowledge and self-awareness.

Attorneys for the church have charged that there was not probable cause to conduct the raids on the church locations and that agents using power saws, crowbars and battering rams did extensive damage to areas not specified in the warrant.

The actions of the FBI constituted a violation of the church First Amendment right to freedom of speech and religion as well as Fourth Amendment right against an illegal search and seizure, the suit said.

A church spokesman called the FBI's actions "Gestapo-like." The suit charged agents "chanting, 'FBI—we have a search warrant' . . . burst into rooms where married couples were sleeping unclothed . . . and burst into shower stalls where people were bathing."

One female church member trying to take a picture of an FBI agent was struck on the head with a clip-board by the agent, according to church spokesman Vaughn Young at a

Greater Los Angeles Press Club news conference.

At the old Cedars-Sinai hospital complex, 4833 Fountain Ave., now owned by the church, agents "roamed and searched at will" on the upper five floors of the building, the suit said. The search warrant specifically identified the first-floor office area as the focus for the search.

More than 150 specifically identified documents allegedly stolen or copied in the Washington burglaries were sought in the search of the church locations.

Young was particularly critical of the authority given by the search warrant for the FBI to take any documents or evidence about crimes of conspiracy, obstruction of justice or theft of government property.

It was under that authority that the FBI seized the vast majority of the documents in the search. In addition, lock-picking equipment, eavesdropping devices and dossiers on government officials also were taken by the FBI, it was learned.

Neither of the two Justice Department attorneys named in the action, Henry Schuelke III and Raymond Banoun, could be reached for comment. An FBI spokesman said the bureau would have no immediate comment.

Generally, however, government attorneys and FBI agents have virtually total immunity for actions they perform in their official capacity, Justice Department sources said.